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WATCH  
FOR  
NEW

PLANT  
PESTS

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CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

# the EGYPTIAN COTTONWORM



# The Egyptian Cottonworm

*The Egyptian cottonworm<sup>1</sup> is not known to occur in the United States. It may get in. If it does, and if it becomes established, it may cause serious damage to many crops. Resultant financial losses could be heavy. Watch for this insect and for any other insects you do not recognize. Report them promptly so they may be identified, controlled, and possibly eradicated.*

This pest is a general feeder. It attacks not only cotton but tobacco, tomatoes, corn, beets, potatoes, grasses, legumes, crucifers, rice, and ornamental plants.

In Egypt, the Egyptian cottonworm has been known to reduce cotton yield 75 percent. In Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, and Australia, it is a major pest of tobacco. In Sumatra, in 1 year, it injured the leaves of many

tobacco plantings as much as 33 percent.

The Egyptian cottonworm is widely distributed in areas of the world that ship huge quantities of products to the United States. It occurs throughout Africa, and in most of Asia including Israel, Syria, Iran, Arabia, India, Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, China, Japan, and Korea. It is found in Australia and in most of the Indian Ocean and South Pacific Ocean regions. In Europe, it occurs in southern England, Greece, and Spain.

<sup>1</sup> *Prodenia litura* (F.); family: Noctuidae.



*Geographic distribution of the Egyptian cottonworm. Red areas indicate parts of the world where this pest occurs.*

This insect is closely related to several pests of economic importance that are well established in the United States; they include the southern armyworm and the yellow-striped armyworm, which attack cotton. The Egyptian cottonworm might enter the United States and become established here. If this were allowed to happen, the resulting loss in cotton and many of our other important crops—and the cost of control measures—could be tremendous.

#### DESCRIPTION OF INSECT

The larvae are about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long when fully grown. In late stages of development they are a dirty brown color, and have triangular dark blotches on the sides of each body segment. The pupa is reddish brown, and is enclosed in a rough earthen case. The adult is a moth that has a wing-spread of about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches. It resembles the adult of the yellow-striped armyworm but has darker hindwings. The head and thorax are a whitish color tinged with pale red. The abdomen is yellowish brown tinged with pale red. Forewings are yellowish



Two types of damage caused by the Egyptian cottonworm to the leaves of Egyptian cotton.

brown and have white markings. Hindwings are white; their apices are lightly tinged with brown.



Upper left, adult female of the Egyptian cottonworm; lower left, pupa; upper right, mature larva; lower right, adult male. Enlarged.

## DESCRIPTION OF DAMAGE

Damage is caused by the larvae, which feed on the numerous host plants mentioned in this publication. Young larvae tend to crowd on one or two leaves of a plant such as tobacco; fully grown larvae range all over the

plant. In warm climates this pest breeds almost continuously; consequently, the plants are seldom free of attack. In Egypt, seven generations occur in a year; the two largest occur on cotton.

## THE PLANT PEST PROBLEM

At least half of our most destructive insects entered the United States from other countries, many before the Plant Quarantine Act of 1912 was passed. Today, thousands of plant pests are intercepted at our borders by plant quarantine inspectors, but some of them still gain entry.

When a new pest is detected, organized efforts are exerted to (1) pinpoint the areas where it has become established, (2) set up a quarantine to prevent spread, and (3) control the pest and eradicate it if possible. The sooner a new pest is detected, the better is the chance of controlling or eradicating it before it does serious damage.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Watch for this pest in fields of cotton, tobacco, tomatoes, corn, beets, rice, or potatoes, and on ornamental plants. Young larvae of the Egyptian cottonworm appear in large numbers early in the season when host crops are small. Any unfamiliar larvae causing damage at this time might be Egyptian cottonworms. Later in the season, an unusual number of unfamiliar moths appearing at regular intervals of 4 to 6 weeks should be investigated. If you

find larvae or moths you do not recognize, send specimens to your nearest agricultural official. Mail them in a small bottle containing rubbing alcohol. Include a note giving your name and address, and telling where the specimens were found and on what plant. Do not send live specimens. If your local agricultural official does not recognize the specimens, he will send them to the proper authorities for identification.

*Prepared by*

Plant Pest Control Division  
Agricultural Research Service

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